

LOOKING AT GENDER REPRESENTATION IN FILM, TV, AND ADS -- AN OUTLINE

-- Julia Lesage [Lesage note, 2017--This was a lecture I gave about 40 times in the late 1970s and 1980s when I was an itinerant scholar.]

I. There is a division between the public and private spheres cross-culturally. In modern industrial times, the division looks something like this:

PUBLIC

work, salary, 40-50 hr. work week
promotions, status
assembly line
product made and sold
social power and decision
"defining" and "naming"
visible social process
peer relations
contractual relations
achievement, quotas, etc.
bars, restaurants
men's turf at night and in
certain areas

PRIVATE

no salary, pension, vacation, retirement benefits, continuous work week, not 40 hrs.
things "messed up" right away again
emotional engagement, anger, discipline, love
boredom of talking only to small children
sex (for a women's economic keep?)
craft-like, less technologically advanced
work
Recreate body/mind after work, referring to
food, sleep, leisure, and recreation
train kids to be socially acceptable, clean,
on-time, do homework, not be overtly
sexual
women's turf: conversation, family ties,
neighbors
go to public space in certain areas--
church, hospital, school, park

II. This division reflects a division of male and female roles in the story:

1. Male heroes are shown as active doers, as belonging to public space.

Female main characters are shown as being (lovely, sexy, depressed, etc.), suffering, sacrificing (for man or children), or enduring.

2. In the minor characters, we often see who are the most socially outcast -- the elderly, those who are not white, gays and lesbians, those who are not "sexy". Here the characters are most often stereotypes, reflecting stereotyped thinking about these social groups.

3. The options in terms of public and private space are different for men and women, and this is reflected in cinematic characterization.

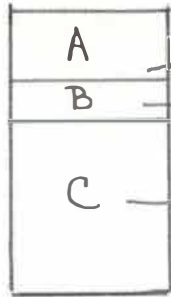
For men, the figure in public space is often the Romantic Hero or the Outsider (poet, musician, reporter, artist, actor, filmmaker, detective). The ordinary roles for men are boss or worker, and the outsider is a position available to the middle class man who chooses not to be either -- in this sense, the prominence of this type of hero reflects the class position, sex, and social choice of the male filmmakers.

For women, the role is often of The Successful Woman Who Loses Emotionally or makes a choice for love. Or she is depicted in areas of the public sphere that are most like the domestic sphere, the service areas that are nurturing or caretaking.

MEN'S CHOICES

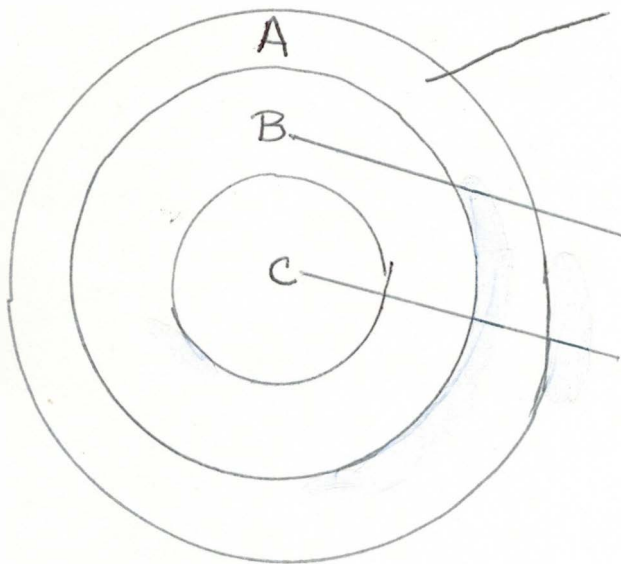
Most Power
Socially

Least Power
Socially



- A. Boss -- has power over worker, makes profit from workers' labor
- B. Outsider -- rebel, from middle-class but rejects bourgeois values and boring 9 - 5 work day
- C. Does boring, alienated labor

WOMEN'S CHOICES



- A. Public World of Decision Making and Power: Public Sphere is usually not open to women at top: business, banking, army, making war, technology, science, government. Sometimes women wear a disguise here: male identification, seduction, dressed as man (fiction).
- B. Public Sphere Similar to Home: Here we find jobs such as school teacher, nurse, clerk, hairdresser, waitress and secretary.
- C. Domestic Sphere: Women's ability to do chores such as child rearing or tending egos is taken for granted as "natural".

III. Ideology resides in the systematic representation of how the world runs.

It is propagated institutionally in the law, church medicine, classroom, books, and newspapers. It also exists in our heads.

It is incomplete, often distorted, or even 180° opposite of reality.

In terms of sex roles, gender representation is most stereotypically ideological in ads, where it is used to sell a never-reached, materially and sexually perfect future, always out of reach (buy more!).

IV. Ideological representations or taken-for-granted assumptions work themselves out most consistently on the MICROLEVEL OF MAINSTREAM TELEVISION AND FILM.

1. Connotations of costume, gesture, body type, voice, set, environment, and music give a "coded" representation of gender which is generally "readable" in urban culture throughout the world. Viewers know who is "datable" or who is the villain.

All connotations suggest a meaning to the viewer. This meaning differs according to one's own experience but is also pointed to explicitly by the image itself.

The viewer often makes a "good/bad," "sexually attractive/sexually unattractive," "important person/unimportant person" judgement based on connotations she/he picks up on from either an image or from something

